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SPEECH

OF

MR. SOLOMON FOOT, OF VERMONT,

ON THE

OREGON QUESTION.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, U. S., February 6, 1846.

The Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union having under consideration a resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, entitled "A resolution of notice to Great Britain to annul and abrogate the convention between Great Britain and the United States of August 6th, 1827, relative to the country on the northwest coast of America, westward of the Stony mountains, commonly called Oregon"—

Mr. FOOT, of Vermont, having obtained the floor, addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: It has been my misfortune to have been confined at my lodgings by severe indisposition, for the most part of the time during the progress of this debate. I know but little of the character and scope of the discussion, except as I have occasionally glanced at the reports. Under these circumstances, I can expect to do little more than to travel over a track already beaten; to say little more than has already been often and better said by gentlemen who have preceded me. Indeed, under any circumstances, it would be little better than arrogant presumption in me to essay to add any new argument, or to give any new interest to a question after it had undergone so long, so elaborate, and so able a discussion as the question now before us has received. It was my desire and my purpose in the early part of this debate to have expressed my views to the committee, had not my attendance upon the House been interrupted. Feeling, as I do, the embarrassment of addressing the committee at so late a period of the discussion, and after the question under consideration has called forth the best talent, the highest eloquence, the profoundest research, and the ripest experience upon the floor of this House, that purpose would now be abandoned but for an imperative sense of obligation I feel, that, upon a question of such momentous and vital consequences to the whole and every part of our country as is involved in the resolution before us, the State, which I in part represent here, should be heard upon it, even though it be through the voice of the humblest of her representatives upon this floor. Much rather would I have been saved the task, (for it is with the most extreme and unaffected reluctance that I ever attempt to address this House,) and that what I trust and believe to be the prevailing opinions and sentiments of the people of that State upon this subject, should have been expressed by either one of

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my more learned and gifted colleagues. But as it is, Mr. Chairman, I must beg the indulgence of the committee while I venture to submit to their consideration some general views upon the subject which has already occupied so much of their attention.

Allow me to say, in the first place, Mr. Chairman, that I do not propose, in the few remarks which my recovering strength will enable me to present at the present time, to go into an examination of the grounds of the respective claims of Great Britain and the United States to the Oregon territory. The time allotted me is insufficient at the same time to allow me to present some other views in connection with this controversy between the two Governments as I desire to do. Moreover, the question of title has been very fully discussed both here and elsewhere. The result of the best and most impartial examination I have been able to give to the subject, upon my own mind is, that both Governments have certain rights and claims there, not perhaps very clearly defined; that neither Government has a clear or perfect title to the whole of the Oregon territory; that neither can rightfully assert an exclusive claim to the whole, or extend its own exclusive jurisdiction over the whole of it, consistently with the rights and claims of the other. The question of title in controversy is peculiarly of that character, which renders it eminently a fit and proper subject for negotiation and compromise. However we may affect to regard our title to the whole of Oregon as clear and perfect, England is doubtless equally convinced that she has the better title to a part of that territory. Not unlike all parties to a controversy, we very readily, and easily, and naturally satisfy ourselves that we are in the right, that the opposing party is in the wrong. The controversy in this instance, as to the question of right, as to the question of title, let us bear in mind, is not among ourselves; it is with another party, with another Government, which claims title against us to a part of this territory. This controversy has existed for more than twenty-five years. It is a question of conflicting title between two Governments, each urging and insisting that it has the stronger and better claim. The arguments which have been addressed by each Government to the other, through their diplomatic correspondence, however ingenious and able they may be, are nevertheless rather the ingenious and able arguments of counsel for a client, than of the judge pronouncing an impartial decision upon the merits of the case. These conflicting claims have been the subject of discussion, of argument, of negotiation, of mutual propositions of compromise and settlement at different periods and under different administrations, representing the views and policy of the two leading diverse political parties in the country, during this whole period of time. Both Governments have occupied the disputed territory, in the mean time, to a certain extent, and for certain purposes, as they now occupy it by virtue of a conventional agreement.

The direct question which is now presented to us, and which I undertake to say is prematurely and inconsiderately forced upon the consideration of the popular branch of the Legislative Department is, whether Congress shall direct that unconditional notice shall forthwith be given for the termination of the convention of 1827; and whether, as a necessary resulting consequence of such notice, after the abrogation of the treaty, we shall assert an exclusive claim to the whole of the Oregon territory, and extend over the whole of it our own exclusive sovereignty; or whether we shall leave the controversy still open, as it now is, for further negotiation and compromise. Whether, in short, it

the popular language of the advocates of extreme measures, we shall adopt as the rule of our action, "the whole or none of Oregon," "now or never," "war or no war;" or whether we shall yet endeavor to effect an amicable adjustment of the controversy, and at the same time maintain the peace and the honor of the country. The answer within and without this Hall, judging from recent indications, would doubtless present some contrariety of opinion as to the most expedient course of action, while all will agree with one accord, that the dictates of wisdom and patriotism alike commend us to that course of action most consonant with the national character and dignity, and which shall best subserve to vindicate and to maintain our national interest, our national faith, our national honor, and, if you please, our national magnanimity.

Mr. Chairman, we have been frequently told that negotiation is at an end; that the door is closed against all compromise, and cannot be reopened without national dishonor. Sir, I do not so understand it. I do not so understand it from the Executive message. I do not so understand it from the Secretary of State. From the very latest intelligence from England, we are warranted in saying, it is not so understood by the official authorities of that Government. Who, indeed, from anything contained in the published official documents upon this subject, is authorized to say, that those to whom is especially committed the charge of this question regard the controversy as having reached a point at which the national honor would be compromitted by the consideration of further propositions of compromise, or by further efforts for an amicable settlement by negotiation, at home or abroad, by treaty or by arbitrament? No one, I assume to say, would feel himself authorized or justified in making such a declaration. How can it be so, while England manifests every disposition on her part to effect an amicable adjustment? Indeed, we have it not only in flying rumors about the town, but we have the authoritative statement of the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, (Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL,) made but a day or two since, upon this floor, in answer to an interrogatory put to him by my honorable friend from Tennessee, (Mr. GENTRY,) that a correspondence had very recently taken place between the official organs of the two Governments relative to this question. I can say, for one, sir, that I was very happy to hear it.

Why, Mr. Chairman, let us ask ourselves, in all candor and soberness, what is this controversy about? What is the nature and character of it? Does it involve any question of honor that renders an appeal to arms, or a challenge to arms, or a provocation to arms, necessary to its vindication? Has our national flag been insulted at home or abroad, by sea or by land? Have the rights of our citizens been anywhere violated, or has our soil been anywhere wrongfully invaded? Has England done anything, or even proposed to do anything, incompatible with the stipulations of the joint convention? Nothing of the kind, sir. On the contrary, England still manifests the strongest desire to maintain, and strengthen, and perpetuate the friendly relations which subsist between us; and not only so, but she seems cautiously to avoid doing anything which would be likely to interrupt those relations, the preservation of which is so vitally important to her interest, as well as to our own. What, then, I ask again, is this controversy about? I answer, that it is nothing more nor less than a mere naked question of title; or, more properly speaking, it is a mere question of boundary. Such

a controversy is, of all others, the most appropriate to be settled by negotiation, by treaty, or by reference. It is a disputed claim to a piece of territory, the evidence of title to which is, in its very nature, somewhat vague and inconclusive, and about which both parties may honestly differ in regard to the strength and validity of their respective claims. It is a case wherein both parties may relax somewhat from their extreme demands, not only without dishonor, but with signal credit, for the sake of peace and harmony. The settlement of such a question most pre-eminently belongs to the statesman, rather than to the soldier; to the councils of the cabinet, rather than to the wager of battle. Sir, it would shock the moral sense of the civilized world, that the two most enlightened and Christian nations of the earth should fail to effect a peaceful and honorable settlement of such a controversy, and should involve themselves in a war in consequence, the end of which, and the disasters of which, no man can foresee or conceive.

But it is urged as an objection to negotiation, or compromise in any way that we have a clear and perfect title to the whole of Oregon. This declaration is often made, I apprehend, without much examination of the question, and with an easy credulity, which is satisfied without further investigation, to repeat, as clear and incontestible facts, the unsupported assertions of a political conclave. The stronger and clearer, however, we can make our title to the whole of Oregon appear, so much the better and safer case we should have for the decision of an impartial and competent tribunal, if the parties should not be able to agree upon terms of settlement between themselves. And surely there could be little risk of our rights in submitting the question of our title to such a tribunal, provided some of these gentlemen will shed upon the board some of the light by which they so clearly see the perfection of our title to the whole of Oregon. Gentlemen have said, by way of illustration, more remarkable for its extravagance than any analogy to the question we are considering, that we might as well yield to the demands of England any portion of these United States, or of this District, or of the ground on which this Capitol stands, and that we might as well propose negotiation, or reference, in such a case, as in the case of Oregon. I can hardly think gentlemen serious in such a comparison, or in supposing that there is any analogy, or any approximation to analogy, in the two cases. In the case of Oregon, we have to meet an adverse claim, and one which has been asserted and insisted upon as long, at least, as we have asserted any claim; and one which we have so far respected as to have made repeated propositions for a division of the territory in dispute; and so far as to have admitted the adverse party to the exercise and enjoyment, in common with us, of equal rights and privileges there. And this is not all. England has had actual occupation of this territory, or a part of it, much longer, and a much larger portion of the time than we have; and under the convention of 1818 she claimed the right of settlement there; and in 1827 we renewed the convention for an indefinite period of time, with the full knowledge that she claimed such right of settlement. I will not ask whether, under these circumstances, we are not estopped from asserting, but I will ask whether we are quite justified in asserting, that England has not only no title, but no *color* of title or claim to any portion of the Oregon territory? Such an assertion, it appears to me, is a direct and palpable contradiction of the concessions of this Government, by a series of treaties, negotiations, and propositions, through a p

riod of more than a quarter of a century; and an unwarrantable imputation upon the conduct and motives of three different administrations of our Government, numbering many of the ablest men and purest patriots of the country, in proposing to surrender to Great Britain a large portion of this territory as a peace-offering, to what is now, for the first time, asserted to be an arrogant and groundless demand. We have, all at once, become vastly wiser and more patriotic than our fathers. Considering the character and the early date of the British claims--considering the grounds and the nature of the evidence upon which our respective claims rest—and considering the manner in which her claims have always been treated, the concessions and the offers made—I have no hesitation in saying, that we shall find less justification in now treating her claims as a mere arrogant and groundless pretence, than we shall in meeting them and treating them with serious and respectful consideration—so long, at least, as she manifests a similar disposition on her part.

Let us suppose that England, being as thoroughly convinced of the validity of her title to Oregon—the whole of it, if you please—as the Baltimore convention and President Polk are of ours, should say to us: "We have a clear and incontestible title to the whole of the Oregon territory; we shall, therefore, insist upon the whole of it; and although we have been negotiating about it for more than twenty-five years, and made various propositions of settlement, and offered you one-half of it, by way of compromise, and you have occupied it, in common with us, all this while, we shall now close the door upon you, and give you notice that, at the expiration of twelve months, you must quit possession; from that time we shall exercise our own exclusive jurisdiction over the whole of it; we shall no longer listen to any terms of compromise; we shall neither propose nor receive any further offers for negotiation, nor will we submit what we consider a clear title in us to the decision of any disinterested tribunal; all your claims are a mere pretence, without foundation or shadow of title. We own the whole; we demand the whole; we will take nothing short of the whole; and, in so doing, we claim only what rightfully belongs to us; and if you choose to go to war with us for taking only what is our own, we will meet you as best we can. Let consequences take care of themselves." This is very much after the manner we are now addressing ourselves to England upon this subject; and how, think you, we should be likely to regard language of this character by her to us? I need not say we should regard it and treat it as the highest indignity which could be offered to us. It would be met with a universal response of condemnation, not only from the whole American people, but from every civilized government on earth. No alternative would be left us but tame and dishonorable submission, or an appeal to arms, and to the God of Justice, in vindication of our invaded rights and insulted honor. Her tones of arrogance and insult would find a response in the united voice of an indignant nation's scorn and defiance. Is England less sensitive in regard to her rights and to her honor than we are? Will she be more likely than ourselves quietly to submit to acts of encroachment upon her rights, or what she considers to be her rights? This is not the character or spirit of the British Government. That is not the character or spirit of any civilized government on earth. Whatever act on her part, touching this controverted question, we should regard as offensive and hostile, and as affording a just provocation and cause for war,

will, on our part, be precisely so regarded by her. Who will venture to say we should declare war against England, or consider it as just cause for war, in case she should give us notice for the abrogation of the joint convention, and should assert her exclusive sovereignty over the Oregon territory; and yet that England would not declare war against us, nor consider it just cause for war, in case we should do the very same thing? Is it wise, then, is it patriotic, is it magnanimous on our part, to address ourselves to England in a tone and manner which, coming from her, we should so readily condemn and resent; or to do any act which, if done by her, we should regard as offensive and belligerent? Should we not, by such a course of conduct, even in a good cause, place ourselves in the wrong before the eyes of the civilized world? There is a good old golden rule, as applicable to the conduct of nations as of individuals: "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you." There is an honor, a glory, a moral heroism, in acting upon the principles of this rule, which never sprang from the red fields of blood and carnage.

Mr. Chairman, believing as I do that this unfortunate and protracted controversy may yet be amicably adjusted; believing as I do that it is the desire and the expectation of the great body of the American people that it should be so adjusted, I cannot discharge what I deem to be my duty as a representative upon this floor, looking to the best interests and the highest welfare of the country, without entering my most earnest protestations against every course of action, and every course of remark, which, in my judgment, shall tend, in the slightest degree, to close the door to such an adjustment; which shall tend, in the slightest degree, to interrupt or embarrass negotiation; and, above all, which shall tend in any degree to array the two Governments in hostile collision upon such a question. In so doing I am sustained by the conscious assurance of the approval of those for whom I am authorized here to speak and to act. How could we more effectually close the door to all further negotiation, and to all hope of an amicable adjustment, than to notify England of our determination, after the expiration of twelve months, to take exclusive possession of the whole Oregon territory? Will she be in a better mood to negotiate by our informing her that she has no shadow of claim to any portion of that territory? Can we treat with her upon better terms, and render an amicable settlement more probable and more speedy, by telling her that she must quit possession and abandon all pretension of any title there after one year's notice? I confess it strikes me very differently. I am not, however, unwilling to vote for notice in some qualified form, expressing our earnest desire still to negotiate a settlement, and giving assurance that it is given with a view to a more certain and speedy adjustment.

However much gentlemen may be disposed to decry and denounce the course of former administrations, in offering a division of this disputed territory by the 49th parallel of latitude, and however they may denounce those who would now acquiesce in such a division as a fair and honorable settlement, I trust the friends of the present Administration will spare it their denunciations for having made the same offer, notwithstanding the extreme pretensions and lofty assertions of the inaugural. Who doubts but if that offer had been accepted it would have received the approbation of the great body of the American people of all parties? Instead of our ears being saluted with the clamor about an ignominious surrender of American soil, and of

American citizens, or of a sacrifice of national interests or of national honor, the deed would have been hailed as one of the proudest and noblest achievements in our diplomatic history. Surpassing credit would have been claimed for the wisdom, and tact, and promptness of this Administration, in effecting a peaceful and honorable adjustment of this long standing controversy. Yes, sir, had that proposition been accepted, I doubt not it would have received the sanction of the American Senate and of the American people, and been every where hailed as the harbinger of abiding peace and harmony between the two Governments. Even the manifesto of the Baltimore convention would have been forgotten amidst the general jubilee at the glad tidings of a result so fortunate and so desirable. And I will venture the prediction that, if the present Administration should ultimately settle this question upon that line of division, they who now most confidently assert our title to be clear and indisputable to the parallel of 54° 40', and who now most vociferously declare that not one inch of the territory short of that line can be surrendered without dishonor and disgrace, will at least be silent, if not the first to commend the act.

I entertain the opinion, Mr. Chairman, that if wise and considerate counsels prevail on both sides, this controversy may yet be brought to an early, an amicable, and satisfactory arrangement. The letter of the Secretary of State, withdrawing the proposition which he had made, concludes by expressing the hope that such an adjustment may still be effected, and peace and harmony between the two Governments still be maintained. We are bound to believe that this expression was made honestly, sincerely, and in good faith. It was made, too, officially, and under the immediate direction and authority of the President of the United States. We are bound to believe, also, that the proposition itself was made in good faith, and with a sincere desire to bring this controversy to an early and an honorable termination. To assert or to suppose otherwise, would be to impute to the President and Secretary the lowest and grossest species of dissimulation and hypocrisy. I make no such charge. I intend no such charge. If the proposition was made with the knowledge, the expectation, or the hope that it would be rejected, as was intimated by the gentleman from New York, (Mr. KING,) I will leave it to that gentleman to reconcile the act with any principle of propriety, of good faith, or of honorable conduct. Small as my confidence may be in the present Administration, my estimate of them is not yet quite so low as to believe them capable of conduct so unworthy, so base, and hypocritical. And, when they give assurance of their desire that the pending controversy between this Government and Great Britain may be amicably settled, and the peace and harmony now so happily subsisting between them may be maintained, I will believe it to be something more significant than the mere empty forms of diplomatic civility. What, then, are we to infer from the language of the correspondence to which I have referred? Why, most certainly, that the President and Secretary do not regard the rejection and withdrawal of the offer made by them as presenting any insuperable barrier to further negotiation, or as precluding all hope of compromise; but, on the contrary, that they still entertain the hope and expectation of yet effecting an amicable and satisfactory result. In short, that they consider, and are willing to treat the question, as still open for negotiation and compromise. And I venture to affirm, Mr. Chairman, that if there be any one act or recommendation of this new Administration which, more

than any other, commends itself to the approval of the American people, i
is the offer made. and the disposition thereby manifested, in reference to thi
very question. I, of course, am to be understood as drawing my inferences
in regard to the views and disposition of the Administration upon this, a
upon other questions of national concern, from the record, from their pub
lic acts and communications. I am not in the fortunate position which
perhaps, some other gentlemen may occupy, to be in the receipt of any
of their private or confidential communications. But I am not at liberty t
presume that they entertain any private views or opinions, upon any of th
great questions of public interest, inconsistent with those officially promul
gated. If I am not deceived, then, as to the views and disposition of th
Administration upon this subject, if I do not misinterpret their language, o
misunderstand its import, I submit whether we shall not best discharge our dut
by leaving the question, with its responsibilities, where it properly belongs, wit
the administrative department, unembarrassed and unencumbered by an
legislative direction or control. They must understand, better than we can
the state of the question in all the stages of its progress. We are, indeed
informed that negotiations have been resumed, and may now be going on
between the authorized organs of the two Governments. We know nothing
therefore, of the present condition of the question. We have called upo
the President to communicate to us any correspondence which may hav
taken place, since the annual message, upon this subject. He has not ye
responded to that call. We are left to grope in the dark. Hence, I repeat
what I have before said, that this question is prematurely, and inconsider
ately, and, I will add, most unwisely, forced upon the consideration of thi
House. And, blindfolded as we are, you have said that we shall vote upo
it in three days from this time. We are presenting to the world the singula
and extraordinary spectacle of discussing and acting upon a question in
volving consequences no less momentous than of peace and war, while a
information as to the present state of that question is withheld from us.
is contrary to all my views of national propriety that we should be legislatin
at all upon a question of this character, while it is a subject of negotiation
I say, then, let us interpose no impediment to negotiation; let us throw n
possible obstacle in the way of an amicable settlement, while such a settl
ment is within the range of the remotest probability. Let the question re
main untrammelled in the hands of those whom the people have so recentl
appointed to the administration of their public affairs; and in their treatmen
of the subject we will at least indulge the hope that they will be actuated b
a due regard to the interests, the integrity, and the honor of the country
and that, acting under a sense of their obligations and responsibilities to th
American people, they will in due time, if possible, bring this controvers
to a fair, a just, and honorable termination. And, if they can do so wit
the notice, they can certainly do so without it. Besides, by giving the no
tice with the design and for the purpose we have expressed, we at least ru
the hazard of provoking a feeling of irritation and obstinacy, rather than
spirit of good will and conciliation, so essential to a peaceful and amicabl
settlement of any controversy.

But, Mr. Chairman, if, upon the other hand, rash and inconsiderat
counsels prevail on either side, the result must inevitably prove most unfor
tunate and disastrous to both. In the present already excited state of feelin
upon this subject, both in this country and in England, it would requir

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but little of the language of irritation, of menace, or of defiance, on the one side or the other, to arrest all efforts at negotiation, to blast all hopes of compromise, and to involve the two Governments in a disastrous war. It is not to be presumed that either Government will tolerate in the other the claim and exercise of exclusive jurisdiction over the whole of the Oregon territory, or any act looking to the exclusive possession and control of it. Believing that much will be gained by the exhibition of a spirit of conciliation and harmony while much will be lost, and every thing hazarded, by the exhibition of an offensive gasconading tone, I ask, in all earnestness, whether we shall not best consult the interests, the honor, and the happiness of the country, by abstaining from all acts, and from all language of irritation and provocation.

I will, most cheerfully, give my support to any provisions which may be necessary for the protection of our citizens in Oregon, and those emigrating there. These are peaceful and proper measures, and can furnish no just cause of complaint. But let us once assume an attitude of hostility towards England; let us direct that the notice be given forthwith, and without qualification; let us accompany the notice with an assertion of our claim to the whole of Oregon, and the assurance of our purpose to take exclusive possession of it; and let us follow it up with the declaration that the subject is no longer open to negotiation and compromise, as was set forth in the resolution introduced in the outset of this debate by the honorable gentleman from Illinois, (Mr. DOUGLASS,) let this be done, (and it is all proposed to be done,) and I will venture my poor opinion in opposition to any assurance or pledge to the contrary, let it come from however high and authoritative a source it may, that war is the certain, the inevitable, I might say, almost the necessary consequence. The notice being given, if the question be not settled within one year, we can do no less than proceed to take exclusive occupation of the whole territory, or else recede from the position we had taken, with disgrace and ignominy. No one, I presume, contemplates the latter alternative. We shall proceed, then, to take possession and control, and to exercise our own exclusive sovereignty over the whole of the Oregon territory. Do gentlemen really imagine that Great Britain will peaceably and quietly yield to our authority; surrender all claim of title which she has hitherto asserted and insisted upon, and withdraw from a territory which she has actually occupied for more than fifty years; and all this without a struggle or an effort? Gentlemen in this debate have dwelt much and loudly upon the rapacity of England for dominion and empire, and upon the tenacity with which she fixes her grasp wherever she can get hold of a foot of territory. And shall we flatter ourselves that this rapacious, and domineering, and mighty nation will now, for the first time in her history, quietly and peaceably yield to the demands of another nation a vast and valuable territory to which she claims title? Sir, the supposition is too preposterous to be entertained with seriousness a single moment. We may date a war with that power from the day on which we shall do the first overt act, and take the first step avowedly for the purpose of taking entire and exclusive possession of that territory. There is no escape, then, from this alternative, in case we give the notice, except by a settlement of the question within the year. And, as I have already said, the chances of a settlement, in my judgment, are greatly lessened by giving the notice in the form and manner proposed.

If, then, Mr. Chairman, this Oregon question is to be settled by a conflict of arms. I beg of these gentlemen, who would hurry us upon this fearful issue, and who seem almost impatient of the delay, to pause and wait till we are somewhat better prepared for it. Let us first reinforce our army and navy. Let us establish some suitable and adequate defences along the three or four thousand miles of our exposed sea-coast, and along the other thousands of miles of our unprotected northern and western frontier. While you are so prompt and liberal in appropriating the public money for the erection of blockhouses, and stockades, and military posts, through the trackless wilds and deserts hither and beyond the rocky mountains, and to send your companies of mounted riflemen there for the protection of a comparatively small handful of emigrants to Oregon, (measures which I approve, and for which I shall vote,) will you not make some adequate provision for the protection of the property and the lives of twenty millions of your fellow citizens at home? Sir, the mania for the acquisition and possession of foreign and distant lands seems almost to lead us to forget that we have a country and a people around us to care for.

Mr. Chairman, when and wherefore all this sudden excitement upon the subject of Oregon? Who are they that have become so clamorous all at once for the whole of Oregon, and who would declare a general war of expulsion from the American continent of every nation who may chance to have a foothold upon any part of it? Who are they that agitate the public mind, and appeal to the popular passions and prejudices; who denounce as treason against our own Government all suggestions of negotiation and compromise, and who would prefer the fearful alternative of war to any treaty arrangement? Who are they that are ever fulminating their anathemas against Great Britain, as though they alone were jealous of her power and her designs? Who are they that are ever mouthing their oft-repeated professions of sublimated patriotism, as though it were anything more than the frothy declamation of full-grown demagoguism, which evaporates with the breath that utters it? Who are they that arrogate to themselves the privilege of denouncing the conduct and impugning the motives of the advocates of negotiation and compromise, and who denounce as enemies of their country, and the allies of a foreign power, those who would avoid the issues of war, and who would maintain the peace which now blesses our land and the world, by all means and measures consistent with the integrity and the honor of the country? Whence comes, I ask, all this sudden storm of patriotic fury, of vaunting arrogance, of vindictive denunciation of empty and senseless gasconade? Not, I undertake to say, from the industrious, sober, and reflecting portion of the American people; nor yet indeed, from the best friends and truest patriots of the country. Divest the subject of all extraneous and improper influences; remove from it the instigations and influences of selfish and designing men, of a corrupt and hireling press; remove the instigations and influences of jobbers in stocks and jobbers in politics; remove the instigations and influences of demagogues, of cuckoo patriots and Tom Thumb heroes; of President makers and of embryo Presidential candidates; of those who would raise this whirlwind that they might ride upon the storm; of those who would fire the city that they might revel in the plunder of its ruins: Do this, and you Oregon controversy might be settled, peaceably, honorably, and forever, less than ninety days.

I repeat, Mr. Chairman, that, in my judgment, hostilities must inevitably ensue between this Government and Great Britain, if we carry out all the measures we propose in relation to Oregon. To suppose otherwise, would be to suppose that the mistress of the seas has lost her pride and her prowess; that her spirit and her power have departed. If we will not stop to count the cost of a war with England, we may at least ask ourselves what we shall be likely to gain by it. We should not gain Oregon by a war with Great Britain, most certainly. No sensible man, I think, can entertain an idea so ridiculous and absurd, as that we can take and hold possession of Oregon in the event of a war with the English nation. We have neither army nor navy to maintain a position at any single point in that vast and distant region. We shall have occasion enough for all our forces at home. Besides, it would be utterly impracticable to march an army through the immense and totally barren deserts which intervene between us and that territory. Every American citizen would be driven from Oregon, and the silence of its boundless wilderness and desolate plains would be broken only by the howlings of the wild beasts and the wild huntsmen, perhaps, for other centuries to come. I do not fear that England will conquer this country any more than we shall be able to conquer England. Nobody dreams of this. But she can destroy our commerce; she can lay waste our cities and villages; and she can drive us, and will drive us, in spite of all we can do, from Oregon. Gentlemen may affect to sneer and scout as they please at the idea of negotiation, as though there were something submissive and humiliating in it, or as though they feared our diplomatists would be overreached by the superior tact and skill of those upon the other side. Let me remind them, that when they shall have provoked an unnecessary war, when millions of treasure shall have been expended, and an untold amount of human life been sacrificed, and Oregon lost, that very war must be finally terminated by negotiation, by treaty; and Oregon itself, if it be restored at all, must be restored at last by negotiation.

Mr. Chairman, I am as decidedly in favor of Oregon, to the extent of our clear and just rights there, as those who urge the most extreme measures for our immediate and exclusive possession of the whole of it. It is for this reason that I am opposed to any measure which, in my judgment, will hazard a peaceful settlement of the controversy, and throw our rights and interests there upon the issues of war. But suppose that all efforts at a settlement of these conflicting claims between this Government and Great Britain fail, and things remain as they have for the last twenty or thirty years: shall we lose anything by it? Have we lost anything by it thus far? Not at all, sir. But, on the other hand, we have been the gainers by it, and we should continue to be the gainers by it, if demagogues would but cease to agitate the question for political and sinister purposes. Let this question, affecting our foreign relations, remain as it did during the administrations of Mr. Monroe and Mr. Adams, of Gen. Jackson and Mr. Van Buren, disconnected with our domestic strifes, and it will be well enough. The natural progress of events, the steady and increasing flow of emigration, would ultimately and surely secure to us the sole possession and control of that country. In that sense, and in that way, I will agree that Oregon will be ours by the "decrees of destiny." While we have been doing so well, then; while, with every passing year, we have been adding strength to our claims and possessions there, let us not hazard every thing

by the adoption of hasty and hostile measures. It would be the extrem
of folly to cast upon a doubtful issue the acquisition of that which the sile
and natural course of things must inevitably give to us. It is not to be d
guised, however, that the question has been involved in difficulty and da
ger, and wholly in consequence of having mixed it up with the party co
tentions of the day, and in consequence of that swaggering declaration
the world, that "our title to the whole of Oregon was clear and unqu
tionable," after our repeated concessions of the rights and claims of Engla
by our own solemn official acts. Can any better or truer reason be assign
for the present vexed position of this Oregon question, than that it has
sulted mainly from an unworthy disposition to throw every great questi
of national interest into the arena of party politics and party strife:—from
jealous fear that one ambitious aspirant for the popular favor will get t
start of another in turning the popular current in his favor upon some gr
question of public interest? There, too, I venture to affirm, lies the reas
and the motive for springing this question upon the public attention at t
present time. Texas has made one President for us, and it seems to be
termined that Oregon shall make one or two more for us; and it is presum
that he who gets the first start upon it will be the favorite of the people.
put the question to the House and to the country, whether this whole O
gon excitement, which has been got up of late, is anything more than
preliminary scramble for the Presidential succession. Hence we have n
tests of moral and political worth; new tests of one's attachment or indiff
ence, his love or his coldness, towards his country; and new tests of politi
orthodoxy. He who now clamors loudest for the whole of Oregon is
best patriot; while he who halts or doubts is a traitor, aye, a "Brit
Whig." He who most ostentatiously vaunts his courage is the brav
man, while he who has too much modesty and common sense to act
bravado, lacks in spirit, and is a parasite and a coward.

I am free to admit, that I consider the question now before the Ho
out of time, out of place, and out of order. However expedient it mi
be to give the notice; legitimately and constitutionally, we have nothing
do with it. It is a prerogative which properly and legitimately belongs
the Executive department of the Government. This House is not con
tuted an advisory council to the President. Such advisory power, if I m
so call it, belongs to the Senate, as a co-ordinate branch of the Execu
department in the treaty-making power. It could not have been conte
plated in the treaty that any legislative action would be required, in orde
invest the President with authority to give the notice, whenever, in
judgment, the public interest should require the abrogation of the conv
tion.

I agree with gentlemen that this Oregon question is one of national c
racter and interest; that it should be considered and discussed, when cons
ered and discussed at all, in a liberal and national spirit. For this reas
it is a matter of regret, as it was an act of folly, that the attempt was e
made to adopt it as the peculiar creed, and to identify it with the action
either of the political parties of the country. And whoever would be c
trolled or influenced in his action upon it by any narrow, sectional, or pa
san considerations, would prove himself recreant to his obligations as
American statesman, as an American citizen. I believe I appreciate

ighly as any gentleman the importance of that country to us in a commer-
ial, political, and national point of view; I believe, with the learned and
quent gentleman from Alabama, (Mr. HILLIARD,) that the day is not far
tant when a railroad will span this continent, uniting the Atlantic and
acific shores, and which will thenceforward become the great highway and
roughfare of the commercial world. If I differ at all with the loudest
d fiercest champion of Oregon, it is only as to the extent of our title
re, and as to the best and surest mode of ultimately, if not immediaately,
aining exclusive possession and control of what rightfully belongs to us.
the question of title or boundary should finally be settled by negotiation
a consummation devoutly to be wished by all good patriots—and the 49th
arallel should be fixed upon as the line of division, I doubt not it would
entirely satisfactory to the American people. The possession of the coun-
south of that line would give us all the practical advantages we should
rive from the possessiou up to 54° 40′. Besides, Ifear not to say, it
ould give us all to which we have any clear title. While I am satisfied
at we have the better title to that portion of the country drained by the
olumbia river, I am equally satisfied that England has the better title to
portion drained by Frazer's river; and the 49th parallel would be as
r and equal a division between these respective sections of country as
uld be drawn by a straight line. Such a division would give to each
ty their just proportion, according to their respective titles; and this is the
e to which the parties ought to come, and must come, at last, if they will
le the dispute between themselves. I doubt not the earnest desire of
British Government, for an early and amicable settlement of this ques-
n; and, if that disposition be met by a corresponding spirit on the part of
is Government, it may be settled upon a just and equitable basis. I
ould rejoice, even, that the present Administration should reap the reward
d the honor which would belong to such an adjustment of this ancient
ontroversy. The event would everywhere be hailed as the harbinger and
e promise of peace.

It is the desire and the policy of the people of this Government to main-
n peace with all nations. They do not desire war. They do not be-
ve there is any occasion for war; and, above all, they deprecate that folly
d foolhardiness which would inculcate a spirit of war in the public mind;
hich would "prepare the hearts of the people for war." The sentiment
more worthy of a past and a barbarous age, than of this enlightened re-
blic. I will not stop to expatiate upon the evils and the horrors of war,
owever inviting a theme for declamation, nor to speak of its influences up-
n national character and the public morals. It is enough to say that the
pirit of war is, in its very nature, hostile to the spirit of Republican liberty.
t is a spirit which but too often degenerates into an unbridled lust for
lood, and rapine, and plunder. We have read in vain the history of other
tions, if we have not learned that it was a kindred spirit which blotted
t of being the republics of "olden time;" which have slept in the tomb of
ght these two thousand years, and "the morning of whose resurrection has
ot yet dawned upon the world;" that it was a kindred spirit which filled
with rapine and blood the modern republics of Venice and Florence. The
achings of history have been in vain to us, if we have not learned that it
as a kindred spirit which infuriated to its blackest deeds of atrocity the
acobin factions, and the sans-culottes democracy of revolutionary France,

and which built up, upon the fall of liberty there, that imperial and milita despotism, before whose colossal power the world itself stood aghast; that was a kindred spirit which tore in sunder the later republics of South Am ica, and struck down to the dust the flag of liberty which had been rea from the summit of her Andes. Let this spirit become the predomina spirit of our countrymen, and it needs not the ken of prophetic vision to monish us that this young republic has already reached the years of its cline. Let this spirit prevail here, and I stand upon the authority of t world's history, and proclaim to the American people that their destiny foreshadowed in the fate of those other republics that have fallen before

The spirit of war, thanks to God, has slumbered upon the earth for t last quarter of a century. Glutted with the spoils, and exhausted by t ravages of a thousand years, it halted in its march of death, and reposed fr its work of desolation, on that dread night when the sun went down in blo on the field of Waterloo. Heaven grant that the slumbering giant be disturbed in his repose for other ages to come. The world has had time take breath. The spirit of Peace—a peerless, and godlike form—rose ere and with steady and triumphant step advancing over the earth, has pensed, with an abundant hand, blessings and honor, and glory and hap ness, to the nations. In what age or century of the world have the prin ples of civil and religious liberty, the arts and sciences, civilization a christianity; all that elevates, and all that adorns, and all that ennobles dignifies the character and condition of man, made such advances as with the last thirty years? which may be truly denominated the age of pea It has been an age of progress. It has been an age of glorious achievem of intellectual and moral triumph, such as the world has never before se

Sir, I cannot longer dwell upon this theme. It is, indeed, a rich exhaustless and sublime theme, worthy of the contemplation, not of poet and the orator only, but of the civilian and statesman, of the phila thropist and patriot.

Mr. Chairman, I know that war is sometimes necessary—sometimes u voidable. It furnishes but a melancholy evidence of the depravity of m that war is ever justifiable. The fearful alternative of war may be for upon us, either by ill-advised counsels at home, or by aggression and wr from abroad. If the long peace we have enjoyed is to be interrupted, shall do well to see to it that there be no occasion for laying the provocati to our charge. Far better that aggression and provocation come from other side. Let us, if possible, in the judgment of the world be in the rig and our adversary in the wrong. In such a contest the victory will be h won in the outset. I would yield much to the spirit of peace and harmo and if the sword must be drawn, let it be in a just and necessary war; it be in defence of the invaded rights and honor of the country. And wh that crisis comes, if come it must, it will be met by the American peo with one voice and with one heart. If war be brought upon us by the r and reckless counsels of those whom the people have placed in the high seats of power, while they will be held to a fearful account before the su preme appellate tribunal of public sentiment, our talismanic watchword w still be—"our country, our whole country, and nothing but our country

Something has been said, in the progress of this debate, of the chivalry the south; something has been said of the valor of the west. I choose rat to say, of all the people of this nation—whether they reside in the east

al and milita the west, whether their lot be cast upon the sunny savannas of the south,
aghast; that or among the "old gray mountains" of the north—that, in such a crisis,
f South Am they will all be chivalrous and brave, that they will all be generous and
ad been rea patriotic.

e predomina While other gentlemen have been so eloquent in the vindication and
tic vision to praises of their own constituents, and the people of their own sections and
years of its States, I trust I may be pardoned the indulgence of a passing reference to
uthority of those whom I have the honor, in part, to represent here. I am one of but
their destiny four members upon this floor, from a small unpretending border State; a
llen before State which, in some respects, occupies but a subordinate position in the
e earth for the Federal Union; a State, nevertheless, which holds within its borders a peo-
hausted by ple, whose habits of industry, whose general intelligence, whose indomita-
d reposed fro energy of character, whose devotion to the Union and the constitution,
down in blo and whose attachment to the principles of civil and religious freedom, are
g giant be unsurpassed by those of any other State or nation. They may be less for-
nas had time ward than others in sounding their own praises, or in vaunting their own
rm—rose ere patriotism, yet the sons of the American Switzerland will never be deaf nor
earth, has backward to their country's call in any and every emergency. Much as
lory and hap they love the peace and quiet of their mountain homes, when the day of
ave the prin ial and of conflict shall come, I pledge you, upon the authority of one
civilization a whose days have all been passed among them, and who knows full well
t ennobles a heir spirit and their valor, that they will be there, the first and foremost in
ances as with he contest, with "their backs to the field, and their feet to the foe." They
age of pea who inherit the blood and the spirit of the heroes of Bennington and Ticon-
s achievemen roga, will be there. Other Allens, and Starkes, and Lees, and Warners,
er before see will be there, to cheer and to lead her gallant sons to the rescue; and in the
ed, a rich a ace of danger and of death, "upon the green graves of their sires," will
ion, not of testify to the world how much there yet remains of that daring that knows
of the phila not fear; of that patriotism that knows not section or party; of that spirit
which knows no servitude, and submits to no wrong. The people of Ver-
sometimes u mont, and I am proud to say it, are the descendants of the pilgrim stock.
pravity of ma Our fathers sleep upon many a battle-field of the revolution. We claim
may be for kindred with those who fought and fell at Concord, and Lexington, and
sion and wro Bunker Hill. And if my honorable friends here from Massachusetts will
interrupted, allow me to assert a participation of the honor, we claim kindred with those
the provocati whose mighty voices first awoke the echoes of freedom within the ancient
come from t walls of Faneuil Hall; with those who bore no subordinate part in laying
be in the rig deep and strong the foundations of this Republic. Ask me not where such
ory will be h people will be found in the day of their country's need.

e and harmon I trust, Mr. Chairman, that I have an ample apology for this digression,
cessary war; n alluding to my native State, and briefly, though it be but feebly, vindi-
ry. And wh ating the character of her people, in the attempt which was made some
merican peo ays ago to cast a sneer—an aspersion—upon her, by one of her own sons
h us by the re Mr. CHIPMAN, of Michigan,) upon this floor. I have only to say, in re-
l in the highe ly to that attempt, that he who has the taste and the heart to illegitimatize
t before the sa own birth, so far as to repudiate his parentage, commends himself less
watchword w the rebuke than to the commisseration of his friends. And while I trust
our country and Vermont has but *one* son who would make it a virtue to publicly avow
f the chivalry a misfortune to him that he was born upon her soil; I am quite sure she
I choose rath but *one* son who could utter the unnatural sentiment without mortifica-
e in the east on or reproach to her.

Mr Chairman, I trust I am not wanting in respect for the opinions o
those who differ with me in regard to the probable results of giving an un
conditional notice for the abrogation of the joint convention, and of assertin
an exclusive claim, and of exercising an exclusive sovereignty over th
whole of the Oregon territory. With the most profound deference to th
opinions of the illustrious gentleman from Massachusetts, (Mr. ADAMS,)
whose agency and far reaching sagacity the country is so largely indebte
for the rights and claims there which we are now contending for; and wi
all deference to the opinions of others, who express so much confidence th
these measures will not lead to hostilities, I am utterly unable to bring m
own mind to that conclusion. While I will go as far as these, or any oth
gentlemen, in any and every act which may be necessary to maintain th
true dignity and the true honor of the country, I would, for this very re
son, try every just and fair expedient to preserve the peace of the country
Mr. FOOT'S remarks were arrested at this point by the expiration of h
hour.

Note.—This speech was delivered in the House of Representatives t
day before the recent correspondence between the two Governments, touc
ing the subject of Oregon, was communicated to the House by the Pre
dent.